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SUBJECT: DAMASCUS MEDIA REACTION, NOVEMBER 9, 2008: CONFESSORS OF
SEPTEMBER 27 ATTACK AND OBAMA'S VICTORY

News Reports

¶1. Syrian papers reported on the broadcast confessions by the alleged perpetrators of the explosion in the al-Qazza area of Damascus on September 27. Syrian state TV on Thursday, November 7, showed 12 individuals (mostly Syrians) claiming membership in Fateh al-Islam and confessing to planning the September 27 attack on an intelligence complex in Damascus. The confessions featured Wafa

al-Absi, daughter of Fateh al-Islam's leader Shaker al-Absi. Al-Absi's Syrian spouse was also among those who confessed publicly. A number of the confessors made claims of a direct connection between Fateh al-Islam and Saad Hariri's Future Movement (Mustaqbal) in Lebanon. Al-Absi said that Fateh al-Islam received money from Salafist groups, including Saudi supporters, and she accused Mustaqbal and some of its banks of involvement in financing the group. Private Syrian daily Al-Watan reported that the confessions have shaken Mustaqbal, leading to a campaign of arrests in Lebanon. Al Watan also wrote about calls in Lebanon and in Syria to open an investigation into the linkage between Mustaqbal and Fateh al-Islam and Al-Qaeda, and to bring to trial those who caused the Nahr al-Bared tragedy.

¶2. Syrian papers reported on President Asad's congratulatory message to U.S. President-elect Barack Obama. The message expressed hope that dialogue would conquer the obstacles blocking progress towards peace in the region.

Selected Headlines

¶3. Tishreen (SARG-owned newspaper, circ, 20,000)

-- "Lebanese MP Lahhoud Calls for Pursuing Financers of 'Fateh Al-Islam' ... Sheikh Hammoud, Imam of the Jerusalem Mosque in Sidon: The Confessions are True; the Future Block Cannot Deny its Link"

-- "President Asad Congratulates U.S. President-Elect Obama on his Victory: By Dialogue We Conquer Hardships that Block Progress Towards Peace"

¶4. Al-Thawra (SARG-owned newspaper, circ. 70,000)

-- "Perpetrators of the Terrorist Operation in Al-Qazza Quarter Acknowledge Sneaking into Syria From Tripoli ... A 'Fateh Al-Islam' Gang ... The Suicide Bomber is Saudi ... The Future Block is Involved in Financing The Gang"

¶5. Al-Watan (Private newspaper, circ. 25,000)

-- "The 40-Minute Tape Shakes the Future Block ... A Campaign of Arrests in Lebanon ... Calls to Expand Investigation into the Future Block's Affiliation with Fateh Al-Islam and Al-Qaeda, and Bring it

to Trial for the Nahr Al-Bared Tragedy"

Key Editorials

¶6. "Tishreen", "Seizure of the Terrorist Group Proves that Syria is a Country of Security and Safety"

An unsigned commentary in SARG-owned Tishreen on November 8, says: "Syria proved that it is a country of security, safety, assurance, brotherhood, and common existence where there is no place for terrorists and enemies of religion and the homeland

"But dangers still exist ... the terrorist group, by virtue of its affiliation with Fateh al-Islam and Al-Qaeda, and given the nationalities of its members, and the Arab support the group received ... this means that future criminal and terrorist acts are still possible. This is not a time for spite, gloat, or nonsensical comments showing no national and pan-Arab sense of responsibility. This is a time for serious work, caution, and vigilance against this expanding terrorism on Arab land

"Syria will remain alert and impregnable, but the others, near and far, must learn from what happened and from what the terrorists disclosed on the Syrian television on Thursday."

¶7. "Tishreen", "Mere Wishes"

Isam Dari, Tishreen Chief Editor, wrote on November 8: "We advise U.S. President-elect Barack Obama not to listen to U.S. President George Bush's advice or adopt the reports that the current administration will present to him Obama needs not only to change the policy that the administration of Bush and the

neoconservatives drew up, but to demolish the roots of this policy politically, economically, militarily, and socially if he wants to regain the world's confidence in the United States and its international role."

"We believe that issues ranging from the fight against terror and the crises of food, climate, and credit, to the minutest details of American life need to be radically reconsidered so that change can happen and the worldwide joy over Obama's win can be justified."

"Peoples, who were burned for eight years by the fires of Bush's administration, have the right to hope for real change in the U.S. policy We Arabs are interested in seeing the United States once again play its full and effective role as a fair and neutral partner in peacemaking, taking the side of justice, not the side of either party, and acting as a superpower with the responsibility of maintaining world security and peace."

"Obama's mission is not going to be easy in light of the very heavy legacy the Bush administration is leaving behind Syria and the whole world are ready to wage war against 'real terror', but not to use the 'bogeyman' of terror to excuse actions hostile to nations, occupy countries, bring down regimes, and violate international laws and norms

"Obama promised change ... but we do not wager on illusions. Realism is necessary here ... we know the limits and the inclinations of U.S. policy and the forces and pressure groups that draw up these policies and impose them on nations."

"The policy of subjugating peoples, violating the sovereignty of states, looting resources, and waging wars must end. Otherwise, there will be no change."

¶8. "Al-Thawra", "For all These Reasons"

Ahmad Hamadah, a commentator in SARG-owned Al-Thawra, wrote November 7: "Obama indeed has a big chance to bring change, not because the world is looking forward to such change, but because the United States itself needs change.

"No matter what the inclinations of the Pentagon, Congress, and the giant companies ... the United States now needs radical change in

its domestic and foreign policies. The deep financial crisis hit the heart of its capitalist makeup. The ethical crisis caused by U.S. administration's unjust war against Iraq and Afghanistan and its killing of millions of people around the world, brought tragedies upon it. The American citizens no longer tolerate policies that do not express their dreams and interests."

19. "Al-Thawra", "Arab and the Newcomer"

Mundhir Id, a commentator in SARG-owned Al-Thawra, wrote November 7: "Arabs applaud Obama's win for one reason: The departure of George Bush and his Republican team

"We wonder what Obama means by change. As for the Palestinian cause, which is the primary Arab cause, Obama is not much different from the previous presidents

"The U.S. commitment toward Israel is not debatable. As for Iraq, he will keep an American force to carry out the missions of what he called 'fighting armed men and protecting Americans there', which raises questions as to whether he went back on an earlier promise of a full withdrawal

"It might be premature for Arabs to count on Obama's change, although it is necessary to be optimistic. The interests of the United States and Israel will govern any position toward the Arab region or the Middle East."

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